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READING ALOUD TO PRESCHOOLERS AGE 3-6: A REVIEW OF THE RESEARCH

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QUESTION: What is the best thing parents, preschool teachers, and kindergarten teachers can do to influence a child's readiness for reading?

ANSWER: Read aloud to the child!

Although some teachers and parents do read to their children on a regular basis, unfortunately, others do so only as occasional activity. When a preschool teacher ends up with a few extra minutes in the school day, she may pull a book from the shelves and read it to the children. Or, a parent may take time to read to his child, if the child brings the book and prompts, pesters, and cajoles to hear the book read.

Research has shown us that reading to preschool children should be more than an occasional activity, however, and has given specific reasons why. Reading books to children can positively affect their language development, interest in books, academic readiness, success in learning to read, specific reading interests, and social attitudes and values.

Reading aloud is a simple activity to carry out and one that is not very time-consuming. Why, then, isn't it done more consistently by all parents and teachers? Parents do show evidence of interest in preparing their young children for school; for example, many purchase the workbooks found in grocery stores and drugstores that purport to contain reading readiness activities. Preschool and kindergarten teachers include other activities as part of their regularly planned programs because they believe these will enhance children's readiness for reading; for example, phonics exercises.

One reason for failing to read to preschool children, or to do so often, may be lack of knowledge about the value of this activity. In the February, 1977 issue of Language Arts, an article was published which reviewed research on the effects of reading aloud to school-age children (McCormick, 1977). The purpose of the present article is to supplement that review by presenting research related to the preschooler.

Table 1 presents this research. The table allows educators to review in summarized form important data which shows the positive relationship of reading aloud to other educational variables. It is hoped that making these research results readily available will result in increased practices of regular reading aloud to

young children. References following the table allow the interested reader to locate the original research reports to obtain additional information about each study.

Table 1
Effects of Reading Aloud to Preschool Children

A. Variable investigated: EFFECTS ON LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

Researcher: Burroughs Date: 1970 Age of Subjects: 3

Question: How will reading aloud affect language development of children from low socio-economic status homes?

Procedure: Read to children daily for 3 months

Findings: Scored significantly higher than control group on a) receptive vocabulary; b) expressive vocabulary; c) length of sentences used; & d) Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (1965).

Researcher: Chomsky Date: 1972 Age of Subjects: Prereaders

Question: What is the relationship of children's linguistic development to the amount and complexity of material they hear read?

Procedure: Examined variables to determine which showed a positive relationship to linguistic state of development.

Findings: Prereaders in highest stages of linguistic development: a) had more books read aloud to them each week; b) heard books at higher syntactic complexity levels; c) were read to by more people.

B. Variable investigated: EFFECTS ON INTEREST IN BOOKS

Researchers: Haskett & Lenfesty Date: 1974
Age of subjects: Preschool

Question: How can the activity of looking at books be increased as a free time choice in an open classroom preschool?

Procedure: a) teacher had books in classroom; b) teacher brought in new books; c) teacher read aloud from classroom books.

Findings: a) mere presence of books resulted in low frequency of looking at books as activity choice; b) introduction of new books resulted in some increase; c) reading aloud of books by adults produced larger and more stable increases of the desired behavior.

C. Variable investigated: EFFECTS ON ACADEMIC READINESS

Researcher: Hoskins Date: 1976 Age of subjects: Preschool & kindergarten

Question: What are the effects of parents reading to children prior to kindergarten entrance on their academic readiness (general mathematics, knowledge of letters and sounds, aural comprehension)?

Procedure: Read aloud three months prior to kindergarten for at least sixty minutes per week.

Findings: Scored significantly higher than control group on tests of academic readiness.

Researcher: Ferguson Date: 1979 Age of subjects: Kindergarten

Question: What are the effects of listening to stories read on kindergarten children whose reading readiness scores were low?

Procedure: a) Group 1 - heard stories read daily; b) Group 2-time divided between hearing stories and other activities; c) Group 3 - regular kindergarten program.

Findings: Group 1 made significantly great gains in reading readiness scores than Groups 2 and 3.

Researcher: Henry Date: 1974 Age of subjects: Kindergarten

Question: Will boys who are read to by fathers score higher on reading readiness measures than those read to by mothers or those not read to at all?

Procedure: Groups 1 and 2 read aloud to on regular basis (Gr. 1 by fathers, Gr. 2 by mothers) for 6 months prior to 1st Grade. Group 3 did not hear stories read.

Findings: Boys read to by fathers scored better on one measure but not on others.

D. Variable investigated: EFFECTS ON LEARNING TO READ

Researcher: Durkin Date: 1966 Age of Subjects: Preschool

Question: What are the characteristics of children who read before entering school?

Procedure: Examined Variable to determine which showed a positive relationship to early reading.

Findings: In every case children who read early were read to by their parents or by older brothers or sisters.

Researcher: Harty Date: 1975 Age of Subjects: Kindergarten

Question: What are the differences in characteristics of kindergarten entrants who can read and those who cannot?

Procedure: Compared the two groups on 21 variables.

Findings: Frequency of parents reading to children was one of eight variables which showed differences in favor of the readers.

Researcher: Durkin Date: 1974-75 Age of Subjects: 4

Question: What is the effectiveness of a specific program for teaching preschool children to read?

Procedure: Program included: a) development of a sight vocabulary; b) letter and numeral naming; c) reading aloud to the children.

Findings: Reading achievement scores in grades 1 and 2 significantly exceeded those of control group. However, the gains over the control group were not maintained in grades 3 and 4.

E. Variable investigated: EFFECTS ON SPECIFIC READING INTERESTS

Researchers: Mason & Blanton Date: 1971 Age of Subjects: 3, 4, 5

Question: What is appropriate story content for beginning reading instruction?

Procedure: Stories were read aloud to preschool children to determine their reading interests and literature preferences.

Findings: After children learned to read, they were more eager to read books which had been read aloud to them, or books of the same type, than to read other books.

F. Variable investigated: EFFECTS ON SOCIAL ATTITUDES

Researchers: L. & G. Berg-Cross Date: 1978 Age of subjects: 4-6

Question: Will changes in social attitude of preschoolers occur as a result of hearing stories read which express values?

Procedure: Picture storybooks about sex roles, friendship, death, and risk taking merely read to children in experimental group (no follow-up discussion). Control

group read to, but not from stories which expressed the targeted values.

Findings: Little changes in attitudes of control group; experimental group's attitude changes were large and positive.

G. Variable investigated: PARENT EDUCATION

Researcher: Swift Date: 1970 Age of subjects: 3, 4, 5

Question: Can educationally limited mothers be taught how to read stories to their children?

Procedure: Several specific techniques used to teach mothers to read and discuss stories with their children.

Findings: Learned to read stories and discuss them with greater elaboration; became more atuned to respond to their children's questions; changed their perceptions about their roles in the education of their children.

A review of the research on reading aloud to preschool children can only lead to the conclusion that this activity should be a regular and planned one in every preschool and kindergarten classroom, and in every home where there are young children. Reading aloud to children provides assistance in realizing some of our most important educational objectives for preschool children.

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